

Conflict Resolution



by Aruna Ladva

Conflict Resolution

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www.arunaladva.org



Thanks to the One above
who resolves all of our conflicts
and brings peace and harmony
into the world.

Introduction

Om Shanti and greetings of peace to all.

I would like to share with you my story of how this book came about.

Around 1995 I was living in Vancouver, Canada. I was working in a 9 'til 5 job, and helping in the Vancouver Meditation Centre. Suddenly, one fine sunny day, I was fired from my job and was asked to leave on the spot. Two companies had merged, and the new company was downsizing. It was just a matter of time before some employees got laid off. In fact I was seeing people leaving every day, but I had not expected for a moment that it would happen to me!

After the initial shock and a few tears, I took my life back into my hands and thought this is the perfect time to pursue the things I had always wanted to do, that was, to further my education.

After making a case to the unemployment department in British Columbia, they approved my application for (a very expensive) course and paid for it fully. I enrolled at the Centre for Conflict Resolution Training, Justice Institute. The course lasted for about a year and a half and I enjoyed every single minute of it.

I realized that managing conflict was easy and actually fun! Conflict was like any other problem, and to solve a problem you need tools and solutions. My previous idea of conflict was that it had always been there and always would be. This attitude soon changed as I started to embrace conflict and apply some of the skills and strategies in my life. Now I embrace conflict instead of resisting it.

In my usual style of always wishing to share everything wonderful that comes my way, it was in 1999 when I felt these skills would be useful to my wider network of friends and family. I wanted to share these tips and tools with them. So in fact this book has taken a long time to take birth.

I hope you will find the information useful and helpful. More than anything, I hope that as you read this book you will begin to feel more and more confidence in being able to resolve your conflict because where there is confidence, then courage, determination and faith will follow.

I wish you luck, joy, and harmonious times ahead!

Acknowledgements

I feel I am blessed that I have a beautiful network of friends and family around me. In fact, I just have to have an idea, and I feel all the help and cooperation comes dancing towards me. The same has happened with this book.

It has been amazing, that from the moment I decided to put it together in a very short time, everyone's timetable somehow freed up to be able to help!

I would like to thank the following people who have either helped shape me or this book: Dadi Janki, Sister Jayanti, Carol Lipthorpe, Judi Rich, Donia Keith, Viannie Chua, Joachim Debarge, Carla Dube, BK Publications.

And finally I'd like to thank my Father the One above who is the ultimate conflict mediator!

Purpose of this book

The primary reason for this book coming into being is to help make the process of resolving conflict easier and more comfortable. We all have times in our lives when we find it difficult to harmonize with the 'sankars' (personality traits) of others. The term 'conflict' implies a level of anxiety and difficulty, yet as we come to understand the dynamics of conflict, it can empower us to deal with situations more skillfully and resourcefully. Once we apply this practical wisdom, we can live our lives more harmoniously, and with compassion and love.

This book aims to provide a simple but effective set of tools to use when needed. Conflict resolution skills can be learnt and acquired quite easily through a deeper understanding. Then we no longer need to fear conflict, but we can embrace this energy and flow with it.

As you work through this book you will be able to build your own personal tool kit to help you to manage situations. It is not that they will magically disappear! However, if you are working authentically, deeply and regularly on your inner self, then transformation will come both inside you and around you. You will be able to reshape your personality, and be able to create positive and empowering relationships with others, that is, be in harmony.

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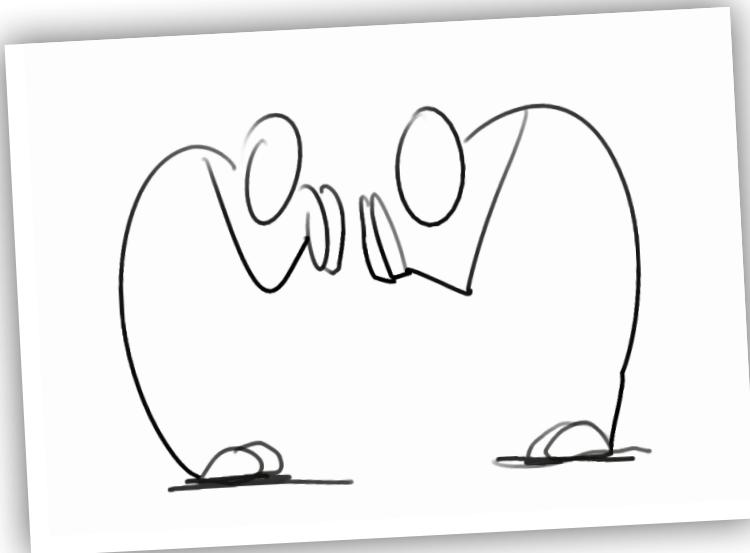
Definition of Conflict

The actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, wishes or perceptions resulting in stress or tension.

Centre for Conflict Resolution Training
Justice Institute, BC, Canada

Part 1

Creating the Environment for Harmony



The Inner Work

The inner work of conflict resolution is to observe and identify the ways in which we approach conflict and to enhance our awareness of how we behave in any conflict situation. The more we can understand ourselves, the more we will be able to understand others.

Since our attitudes, feelings and emotions trigger our actions, it is important to understand this intricate connection. Once we can understand the root cause of our conflicts, they will all become easier to manage.

Inner work is about being ready, willing and open to learning new behaviors and new approaches. It's about building new attitudes towards situations, creating new perspectives and a new vision for all parties concerned.

In any conflict situation it's very easy to blame others and to not take up our own end of the responsibility. Inner work is about taking that personal responsibility and to take charge of our life. Once we do this, we empower ourselves and become masters of the situation. We are no longer waiting for the other party to change, or for them to fix the situation so that we can be happy.

Inner work is about accepting our differences. Each person brings to the table their own set of ideas, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, feelings, experiences, memories, judgments etc. Differences are likely to occur and are part of our everyday life. When a conflict situation happens, each individual sees the conflict from their own perspective. This does not mean that one person's view is correct and the other is not: it simply means that there two different viewpoints.

Awareness of our deep-rooted sanskars (personality traits) and understanding the different ways that 'Maya' (inner negative tendencies) emerges them, is also one of the fundamental steps in dealing with and resolving conflict.

Inner work is also about having deep, concentrated meditation, the sort that burns our impurities. When we return to a purer state of being, we will have fewer differences and fewer conflicts.

Spiritual Power

As the world becomes an increasingly challenging place to live in we need to find new insights and new tools to manage ourselves. We need to reclaim control as the directors and stewards of our own lives. We need to cultivate a different type of power – spiritual power.

What is spiritual power and how do we cultivate it? In fact, spiritual power can be identified as many things.

Firstly it is an inner calm where nothing and no one can shake our personal dignity. It is a strong resolve where one is firm and assured in one's virtues. Spiritual power gives us the strength to not lose control in the face of difficulty and challenge – no matter what!

In dealing with conflict, the power of humility allows us to let go transcend and move on, and the power of detachment allows us to stay dispassionate and focused.

Spiritual power is generated by creating pure, positive, peaceful, powerful and purposeful thoughts, based on the innate qualities of the soul.

Self-Esteem: Valuing Yourself

Everything you attract into your life is a reflection of what you feel you deserve, what you feel you are worth and how highly you value yourself in all areas of your life. Because developing self-esteem is a process and not a destination, you can raise your self-esteem by understanding yourself and increasing your self worth.

Self-worth is the conviction that you are worthy and valuable. Self-worth is the way you talk to yourself about yourself, how you feel about yourself, and the extent to which you think and feel you can cope with the situation in front of you. If you treat yourself well, other people will too. If you give across needy messages, people could take advantage – they may not respect you.

Self-worth gives birth to self-esteem, and ultimately self-confidence. Self-confidence is an attitude. Self-confident people trust their own abilities, and have a general sense of control in their lives. Even when some of their expectations are not met, they continue to be positive and accept themselves. They nurture themselves. They manage their thoughts, not allowing weak or negative thoughts to creep in and sap their confidence.

People with little self-worth depend excessively on the approval of others in order to feel good about themselves. They tend to avoid taking risks because they fear failure. They generally do not expect to be successful. They often put themselves down and tend to discount or ignore compliments paid to them. By contrast, self-confident people are willing to risk the disapproval of others because they generally trust their own abilities. They don't feel they have to conform in order to be accepted.

Feelings of self-worth, self-respect and self-esteem are quite distinct from ego. It is the knowledge and awareness of our own intrinsic uniqueness, beauty and value of the soul, not just the skills and abilities we have or our possessions, or the reputation we hold in the eyes of others.

Self-respect is not boasting or bragging; instead, it is an honest assessment of our successes and the internal strengths that bring us victory.

Self-esteem, or a lack of it, permeates our work and our personal lives – it leaves a mark on everything we do. Cultivating self-esteem and self-worth means you deserve the best at every moment. However, over eating, drinking excessively, smoking, and generally not being in control of yourself, or allowing others to be disrespectful towards you, are all signs of disrespecting the self!

It is recognizing that I deserve the best from life just because I exist and not because of what I am, or because of what I do!

Managing Anger

Many feel justified by their angry reactions. Others consider it to be a 'natural' fight or flight response. Yet anger serves very little purpose and creates a lot of damage. It takes away our peace of mind, leaving us weak and empty. There is a lot of information out there about anger management, but a more relevant question may be, how do we transform our anger?

Anger can be simply a pattern of behaviour, in other words, a habit that we have created over time where we repeat the same reaction to a certain situation. Habits by definition are unconscious ... so to become conscious and aware of our reactions means that we can step in and use the power of choice. Through responding rather than reacting we can begin to change our destructive thought patterns.

Anger is a secondary emotion that surfaces in the form of heated words, a loud tone and wild actions. The primary emotion is ego-based, and springs from fear or a sense of injustice. When ego feels threatened our 'knee jerk' reaction is to defend with anger.

When we are at the peak of our anger, we are at the trough of our ability to discern and to discriminate. In simple words, it makes us stupid! This explains why much of the crime in our society is done in the heat of the moment.

Often people use anger as a means to appear authoritative or to 'get things done'. But this does not work in the long-term, even if it gets short-term results. Some people use anger as a release of pent-up emotion, but this will not alleviate the root cause, and can only cause more damage.

Angry people often don't realize that every time they get angry, the body excretes certain hormones that make them feel good (egotistical!) about themselves. This negative stimulus is like a drug; it gives people a false sense of power. But in reality, it's weak people who feel the need to use anger to manipulate and control others.

Being assertive, not aggressive, is a much better strategy for success. But to be assertive takes self-respect, and the angry person is usually angry for the very reason that they have low self-esteem.

If we choose to see an act of anger against us as simply an act in a drama and nothing more than that, then we would not be so affected

In order to stay cool, be careful not to let stress build up. There are many stress-management techniques – Meditation being one of the best! If I deeply realize that peace is my personal property, then I can choose whether I want to give it away, or keep it!

Self Talk

Self talk is the conversation you have inside your head. It's fine if the conversation is positive, but if it's negative, you will sabotage yourself and the situation. The only conversation we should be having now with ourselves is a positive and constructive one.

This chatter in the mind is a combination of what is going on inside yourself and what is absorbed from outside. While much of the negative self-talk comes from beliefs formed in your childhood, a lot of it is also from life experience.

Self talk influences your subconscious and your root belief system. Use meditation as a tool to empower yourself. As we run a positive commentary in our mind during meditation, our whole being vibrates with positive energy.

This energy will translate into a healthy form of self-esteem and respect for oneself and others, resulting in greater harmony in our relationships.

Don't Postpone Your Happiness

Sadly, many of us continually postpone our happiness – indefinitely. It's not that we consciously set out to do so, but we keep assuring ourselves that "Someday I'll be happy."

A happy attitude has to be cultivated. Take things lightly and go easy on yourself. Nothing is as serious as it looks, and nothing as bad as it seems. If you have lost your happiness because you burnt your expensive shawl, broke your precious vase or scratched your new car, then think again. Did you really ever think that those things could give you lasting happiness?

So what about relationships? What if that someone special, who seemingly gave you so much happiness, suddenly decides to exit your life in whatever way, shape or form? Is your sadness not justified then? Fortunately not! To think that something or someone is the SOURCE of your happiness is an illusion the consumer industry has been thriving and booming on. If you are happy in that one's company, it's because they are REFLECTING back the happiness that is already there inside of you.

The happiness Raja Yoga refers to is not one derived from temporary experiences such as indulging in chocolates or receiving accolades, but rather an innate happiness that bubbles from within the moment you simply remember, that is re-member (reconnect) with your happy state.

Recognizing Beauty and Truth

The Innate Qualities of the Soul

Recognizing that the innate qualities of every soul are of love, peace, truth, purity and power, it's easy to engage in a dialogue with the other party. If deep down every soul seeks harmony with himself and with others, and if each has the same desire and determination, then why would it not be possible to come to some fruitful resolution?

The anger, jealousy or hatred we may be seeing in the world now, is only temporary. It does not originate from the innate qualities of the soul; these negative traits have been acquired, and have buried all the divine qualities. If we will focus on emerging our divinity then it will be easy to see the divinity of others too.

Create the Right Vibration

Creating a peaceful vibration of collaboration is very important when trying to resolve conflicts. Since thoughts are the seeds of our vibrations, negative thoughts will emit negative vibrations and positive thoughts create positive vibrations. With our thoughts, good and bad, we correspondingly create a world of peace or a world of chaos.

Children of the One Father

As children of the One Father, we are all in fact brothers and sisters in this world. Our spiritual relationship binds us together, just as in a family, no matter how clumsy our sibling may be, we will always try and protect that one from others. So too, our vision should be inclusive. We are one, we belong to the One and the One is our Father!

Ancestor Souls

This consciousness of being 'old' souls also cultivates a sense of parental love and care towards the whole of humanity. As ancestor souls, it is our duty to care for and nurture all.

Lawmakers

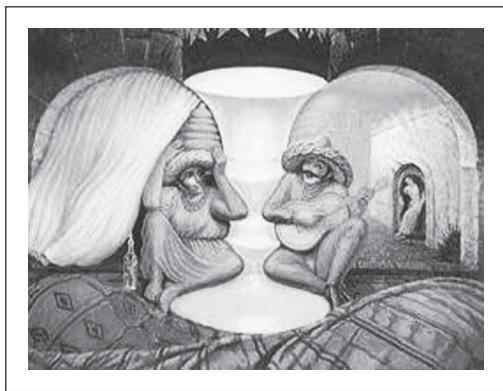
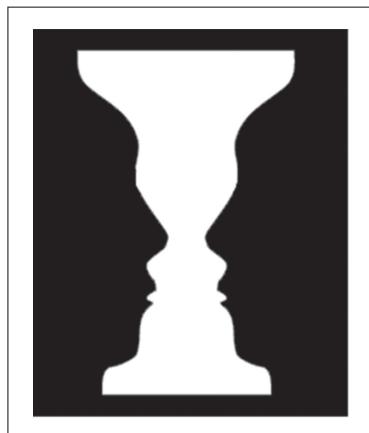
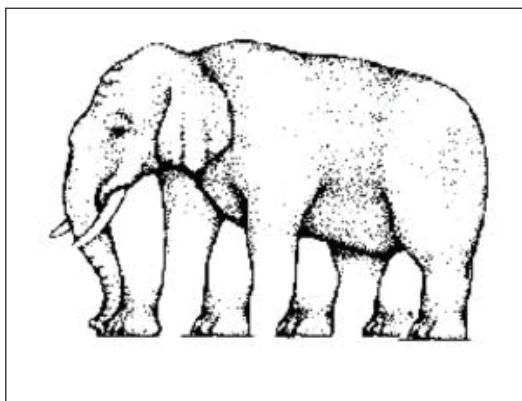
We are the lawmakers and therefore how can we be lawbreakers? It is our duty to reinforce spiritual law and order, peace and harmony into the world where and when possible.

Discovery versus Judgement

If we approach conflict with an attitude of judgment about others or ourselves, we will find it difficult to be collaborative. Judgmental thinking implies that one person is right and the other is wrong and creates a concept of 'you versus me'.

An attitude of discovery allows us to listen to another's point of view with openness and respect for differences. Neither of us is the problem; the dispute or unresolved issues becomes the problem. We become united in tackling the common enemy.

Look carefully at the pictures below, there is more to them than meets the eye at first glance.



What's Your Story?

Do you know that you create the story of your life at every moment? With every thought you create, every action you choose and decision you make, you are totally responsible for the 'drama' and the 'storyline' you create of your own life. With this fact in hand, it proves that we are also responsible for changing that narrative, by transforming one thought at a time!

In life there are many characters and they are living out their 'fantasy' so to speak. Let's look at a few to get an idea of this concept of the drama of life.

There are the heroes – the Supermen and Superwomen of our planet! They are constantly 'rescuing' someone and always in 'action'! They like to jump in and give solutions to everyone else's problems. They are so busy helping others that they don't have time to look at their own lives. But that's fine, because their joy comes from 'fixing' other people and their problems.

Then there are those who like to be rescued! The Cinderellas of the world - the victims, the poor me. These characters almost purposely put themselves in abysmal situations, only to be freed. It is not so much the freedom they seek, but they thrive on the attention that someone gives. They wait for Prince Charming to scoop them away from the 'wicked sisters' and all the mundane stuff they have to deal with.

Then there are the Firefighters – those who are always putting out the fires. There is a saying that when you have a hammer in your hand then everything in the world seems like a nail! In fact, firefighters almost always depend on hunting out the fires of the world – for that's where they get their adrenaline rush. They can also travel to remote parts of the world to seek out and rescue the needy – whether it is street children or some endangered species.

The Romeos and Juliets are the romantics. They always seem to be somewhere else, with someone else, fictitious or real! They are so busy trying to find their truly beloved and that 'balcony', that they miss out on all the other lovely people wanting to befriend them. They fill every scene of their drama with passion - every flower, candle and piece of music plays on their heartstrings and carries them away to distant lands.

And you have to smile at the Exaggerators! Everything that happens to them is a big screen drama. Their house got burnt down – well almost, the candle burnt the tablecloth! They nearly lost their job, but then... they managed to convince their boss with their confidence and powers of persuasion. They almost won the lottery, but missed by three numbers!

The Comedians or Humorists are the most light-hearted. They look for the funny side of everything – even death! Laughter is their means of survival. They mean no harm in their humor, for that is the way they deal with life's challenges.

There are also many other characters: the Complainers for whom nothing goes right, the Royalty without the blue blood, the Perfectionists who are always fussing over small things, and the 'Garbage Recyclers' who go around collecting useless information and gossip from one area, and pass it onto another!

The point is, whatever character you create for yourself, it becomes your reality. And after several repetitions of that narration, it feels as if the script cannot be changed. But that need not be the case. The scripts we have chosen, on the whole, are a survival mechanism. It's what we learnt as kids. Dad spoke loudly to resolve a situation (and it worked!) so I learn to do the same. Mom went quiet to keep the peace in the house, so I also learn to do the same.

Changing the script is like changing a belief system. Increase your self-worth and you will change your inner self-talk - the language and tone you use towards yourself. As you develop more self-respect and kindness towards yourself, you will begin to change your response and reaction to the world around you, and in turn life will reward you for the positive energy you emit.

If you want to change roles on the drama stage, it is absolutely possible to do so - no one needs to stay in roles that don't 'fit' them. If you are unhappy with the way your life is going, begin by creating a vision and an outline of what you would like to see more of in your life. Focus on that daily and nurture that vision. As you change, the world around you will begin to change.

Stories to Illustrate Successful Conflict Resolution

Remember when you were a kid and you wanted to get the teacher's 'goat'? You'd get everyone together and tell him or her you had a plan. "At 10:18am, we'll all drop our books when the teacher is facing the blackboard. It will make a loud bang and she'll jump and we'll all have fun!"

A schoolteacher who used the Aiki Approach to conflict resolution applied it effectively in this situation. At 10:18am, she was writing on the blackboard with her back to everyone. BANG! Everyone dropped his or her books. She turned around, calm and relaxed, walked over to her desk, nonchalantly picked up her book, dropped it with a bang, looked up with a smile and said, "Oh, sorry I'm late."

She chose "I'm with you guys; I'll dance to this tune" instead of "You win and I'm upset" or "You're after me and I am angry!" There was no one for the students to attack. She moved. She was willing to change, to get off line. That ended the attack, because there was no separation. Her willingness to change joyfully transformed the attack into a dance everyone enjoyed.

The Magic of Conflict by Thomas F Crum

The Monk and the Thief

Years ago, there was a Christian monastery in Egypt. It was very poor materially. The only precious possessions were the scriptures, written on three beautiful scrolls, which were always left open on a table in the small study near the chapel.

One day a monk came out of the study, screaming, "Father! Father! Someone is stealing the scrolls!"

The abbot of the monastery came running to the study and saw that two scrolls were indeed missing. But on the windowsill was the third scroll. The thief had dropped it.

The abbot grabbed the third scroll and dashed off in the direction of the fleeing thief. After a long chase, the abbot finally caught him.

The exhausted thief collapsed on the ground and surrendered himself to his captor and awaited the subsequent severe punishment rendered to thieves in those days.

Instead, the abbot stood in front of the man and handed him the third scroll, exclaiming "I have been chasing you for quite a while! I wanted to give you this third scroll. You forgot to take it and it is the most important one. The teachings would be incomplete without it."

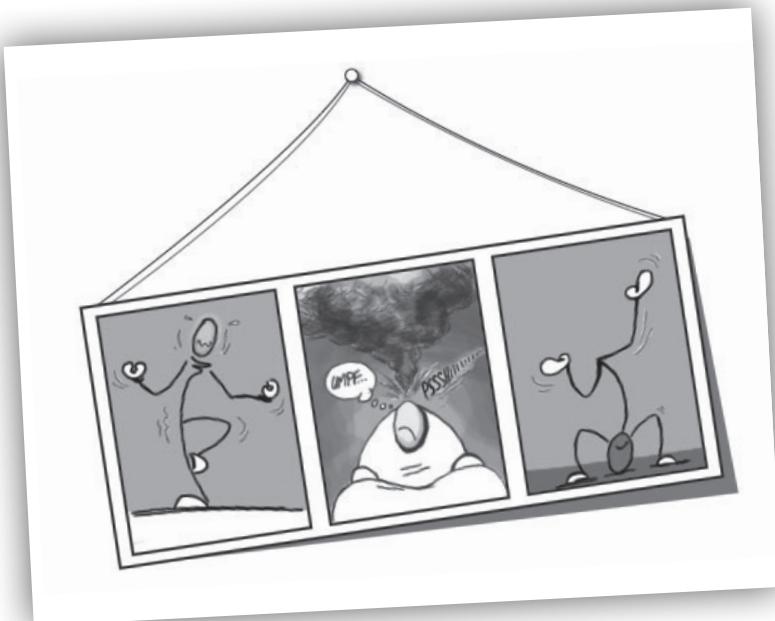
With this, the abbot bowed and walked back to the monastery.

Shortly thereafter, the thief returned to the monastery with the scrolls, totally committed to becoming one of its monks.

Source Unknown

Part 2

Understanding Conflict



Sources of Conflict

The sources of conflict are many; here are a few:

- Jealousy.
- You see them as a threat.
- They mirror something back.
- They remind you of a past, negative experience or of someone else.
- Your beliefs, values, and standards are different from theirs.
- You have opposing styles or ways of working.
- You have high expectations.
- Your standards are very high/low.
- You want a perfect world right here, right now.
- You have very little patience.
- Your ego gets in the way.
- You feel misunderstood.
- Both parties have different expectations.
- Someone is trying to withhold the truth.
- Others are after what you have/own.
- Different cultural backgrounds.
- Bullying.
- Language barriers.
- Lack of communication.

Aspects of Conflict

Separate the People from the Problem

The first part of understanding conflict is to not take it PERSONALLY. There is a problem, and then there is you, and then there is the other party – three separate things. Give the problem a separate seat in the room – its own place, so to speak. Set it to one side.

Conflict is Not a Contest

We choose whether to make conflict a contest; a game in which there are winners and losers. In fact it is a game – but one in which all can be winners.

Conflict is Neither Good Nor Bad

Conflict is neither good nor bad – it just is. If we can create this neutral mindset and not fear, resist or have any arrogance around it, then we will defuse any beliefs or misconceptions about conflict and be in a better position to handle the conflict.

Advantages of Resolving Conflict

- Brings two or more parties closer.
- Prevents stagnation.
- Averts further serious conflict.
- Results in personal and communal change.
- Gives peace of mind.

Disadvantages of Not Resolving Conflict

- Always in a state of tension.
- Feelings of resentment and hatred escalate.
- Other relationships also are affected.
- One can't meditate if one is constantly in tension.
- Trust is questioned.

Weigh up the Cost of the Conflict

Before taking any step, it is important to weigh up the cost of avoiding to resolve the conflict. If I am clear on my gains and losses, that will give me a picture of how to proceed.

Crunching the Ego

To crunch the ego we have to be prepared to be ‘wrong’, to look foolish, small and passive, and we have to let go of judgement, blame, criticism and false pride. When the ego dies, it takes along its many relatives ... fear, hatred, anger, selfishness, and a whole progeny that has hijacked our happiness all along. It is not a small thing to become egoless, and it is not for the faint-hearted. However, the rewards are boundless.

Understanding Karma

The conflict that is confronting us is due to a ‘karmic account’ between the parties concerned. This account needs to be settled. There is a give and take that needs to take place. First give ... and then take!

My Part Within the Conflict

I need to accept my part within the conflict and not run from it or be in denial of it. There is something I am contributing to the situation that is creating the high tension. So let me at least look at my 50%.

An Opportunity for Change

Conflict shifts us into another gear for transformation. It allows us to look at current habits and personality traits, address them, and change them for the better. Look at conflict as an opportunity – the glass half full and not half empty.

I Get to Know Myself Better

Without ever experiencing the tension of conflict in my life, I would never know what my needs, wishes, desires are. Therefore conflicts allow us to take a deep look at our own selves.

Conflict Styles

People respond to conflict in different ways. No response style is either good or bad as each has its purpose and value depending on the task to be accomplished. Knowing which is your prominent style will make you more aware of which style you bring forth in a conflict situation.

Below are some conflict management styles that we adopt to deal with our problems, as described by the Centre for Conflict Resolution, BC, Canada.

Accommodating

When accommodating, individuals neglect their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of others. There is an element of self-sacrifice. Obeying another person's orders when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

Avoiding

When avoiding, individuals do not address conflict. They do not pursue their own concerns or the concerns of others. They diplomatically side-step the issue, postponing the issue for a later time. Or simply withdraw from a threatening situation.

Collaborating (Opposite of Avoiding)

The individual attempts to work with the other person to find some solution, which fully satisfies the concerns of both parties. Both work at the problem for a satisfactory solution, creating win-win outcomes.

Competing (Opposite of Accommodating)

The individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode where one uses all the power one can eg rank, money, eloquence, to create a win – lose outcome.

Compromising

To find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution, which partially satisfies both parties. It does not explore solutions as deeply as when collaborating, but at least goes some way to address rather than avoid the issue. This might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions or seeking a quick middle ground.

Identifying Your Triggers

A trigger is something, usually external, that evokes a deeper emotion, feeling or action. Triggers can be a cue or a prompt, or something deeper such as a memory recall, taking us back in time and revisiting old traumas. For example a person's words or tone of voice could, consciously or unconsciously, take us back to our childhood when we were often scolded in the same way, evoking a disproportionate emotion of fear or stress. When we are 'triggered', our thoughts and reactions will be influenced by our emotion at that moment.

Our reactions to triggers are mainly involuntary. We can be 'triggered' into words and actions quite easily; we might say something bad or do something cruel. The term trigger is often used to imply something negative. If it were 'triggered' into something more positive, we would more likely say that we were inspired or motivated.

Triggers can occur due to emotional or physical fatigue, when our defences are low and we are feeling weak. Or they may simply be an indicator of a lack of control over our mind. We can be susceptible to being 'triggered' because of our ego, (evoking feelings of insult or hurt), because of anger (impatience, intolerance) or because we have a 'short fuse'. Almost anything can become a trigger for us; someone's comment, the cloudy weather, or people not meeting our expectations. Triggers make us vulnerable.

The key to change is to know our triggers before they trigger us into action. For example if you know that on Friday evenings you are most tired and just want to chill, then that is not the best time to get into a conflict resolution dialogue with your spouse or loved ones. Try having it on Sundays. If the behavior of lazy or careless people is a trigger, then move away for a while until you can manage your cool. If rude people are your trigger, then prepare yourself mentally as to how you will respond to them.

Once we know our triggers we can have a better idea of when and when not to engage in dialogue and we can respond rather than react.

Conflict versus Contest

Have you observed what happens when there are differences between you and your spouse, or a difference of opinion between you and your colleague at work, or your child does not listen to your suggestion? What is your 'knee-jerk' reaction? Is it based on your fear of losing the argument? The fear of being wrong? The need to prove yourself ... to be right? When we create a win-lose contest in our mind, our immediate response is that we must be the 'winners'. The big question is, was there in fact a contest in the first place?

Conflict is not a contest. Conflict just is. We choose to make it a contest in which there are winners and losers, and we create a huge scoreboard in our mind. And every time there is a conflict, lights go up in our mind ... 'Ah, another opportunity to take a shot and to score some more points!'

A part of us wants to win and be right every time. It's as though we are racing for an Olympic Gold! In the process some of us create our contests (conflict) just so that we can pointscore!

Stop looking at the scoreboard. If you lose the small battles, it doesn't matter, you will definitely win the war!

SCOREBOARD

Mr. Crazy

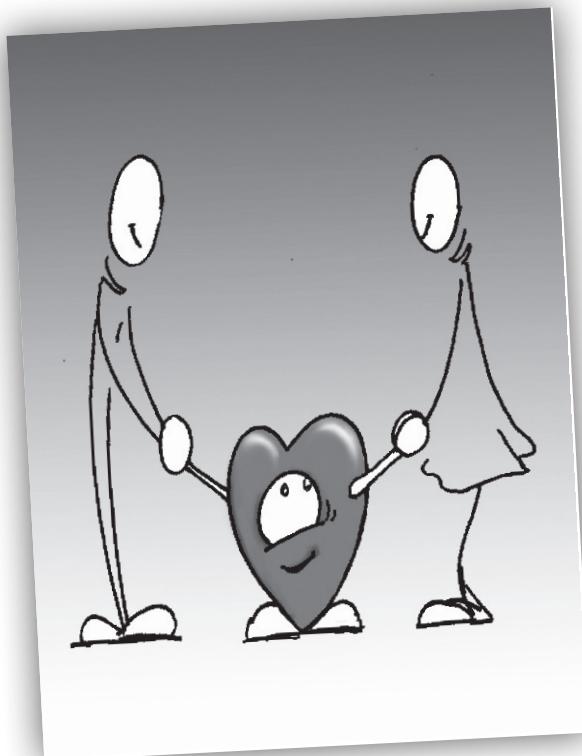
10 points

Mrs. Crazy

20 points

Part 3

Communication Skills



Introduction to Communication Skills

We live in the age of communication – so many of us have a collection of cell phones, laptops and various other gadgets that connect us to a world of information in an instant. Channel hopping, ‘Googling’ and ‘Facebooking’ have all become favourite pastimes, and it’s commonplace these days to ‘video skype conference’ with people from all around the world. The technology of connectivity available to us today is astounding.

But are we truly communicating? Or have we in fact lost the subtle art of connecting with another human being from the level of the heart, in favour of simply living in a world of noise and pictures? How much value do we really give to the spoken word, when truly spoken from a place of spirit?

In fact how we communicate with others, and how we receive from others depends a great deal upon our sense of self-worth. A ‘Yahoo’ chat with dozens of friends may give us a sense of power and self-esteem for a moment, but it is in fact far more courageous and ultimately fulfilling to listen, to really listen to the human being that is in front of us and to venture into a genuine conversation.

First and foremost it is important to ensure that the attitudes and feelings behind the words are always coming from a place of goodwill. It takes self-understanding and self-esteem to be able to achieve this, but in order to maintain good relationships and resolve any conflict or misunderstanding, the inner work of respecting myself and the other party is essential. Feelings constitute 93% of the communication. If I don’t really like or respect the person I am dealing with, then everything within and outwith my whole being will communicate that message.

It’s also true that 85-90% of the messages we convey to others are expressed non-verbally through our largely unconscious body language. Our actual words only form a tiny percentage of the communication that is received. Therefore our true feelings will definitely reveal themselves, whether we like it or not.

Words, and the intentions behind them, are a subtle form of energy. Whatever you send out inevitably comes back to you like a boomerang. If you find yourself thinking negatively about someone, watch out!

Someone with a heart that is filled with pain, sorrow and discontentment, will almost always be complaining, usually with bitterness or resentment just below the surface. True communication is then impossible, because one party will be busy proclaiming their misery or attempting to get their needs met, meanwhile the other party is either busy competing for some attention, or alternatively, will have just 'Switched off, shut down and gone home!' , many of our conversations these days are not so much a dialogue, but more like two monologues happening at the same time.

Likewise, an argument can never be a communication, because it lacks the essential ingredients of compassion, equality, and the ability to listen to and understand one another. We create contests out of our need to be right, but in fact we are both entrenched in a losing battle.

An enlightened soul will be able to speak many languages in order to communicate with others: the language of the heart, the language of the soul, and the language of the eyes. All of these take place in silence.

Ways in which We Communicate

One frequently cited breakdown is:

55% Body Language

38% Tone of Voice

7% Words

It is very often not what we say, but how we say it that makes all the difference. Saying to someone, "I really care for you", but using an angry tone, is unlikely to sound sincere and authentic. Hitting someone, while saying "I love you", is a contradiction.

We can communicate verbally by using speech or the written words, and non-verbally by being vocal, but the vocals are our laughter or sneers or grunts. We communicate through our behavior such as folding our arms and looking away. Or we can communicate silently, by refusing to say anything. By not saying anything, we are in fact saying a lot.

Increasing Your Power Base

Power is an elusive thing. Much of it is largely our perception. If you feel powerful, you will exert power. If you feel powerless, you will allow others to exert their power over you. If power is shared, there is more of a chance of collaborative conflict resolution. If power is withheld, such as in a positional stance, then it is obvious you are heading towards a win-lose situation.

Factors that can affect your power base...

Self-Esteem

True self-esteem gives birth to self-confidence which becomes a secure and steadfast anchor in the midst of a heavy storm in the sea of life. Everyone can use a little extra confidence in their lives from time to time.

Feeling good about our ourselves and our abilities, affects every area of our daily lives. It keeps us grounded; it keeps us balanced. It acts as a reference point in our life, a springboard that determines the quality of our thoughts, words and actions. It makes us spiritually and emotionally powerful so that we can handle life's many challenges with ease.

Ability to Handle Stress and Pressure

We all have our own cycles of stressful thinking. When we are unable to cope with the pressures of life, we are vulnerable and fall victim to stress. Stress affects the way we think, feel and behave. Don't enter conflict resolution if your stress levels are high. You will end up reacting and spoiling your chances of resolving the conflict. Cool down, take a break or take a nap first!

Fear

Fear is at the heart of all negative emotions. Fear paralyses us, it does not empower us. It comes because there is resistance and therefore attachment to something - an idea, a position, a person, anything. If you enter conflict resolution being fearful of the other party or of the outcome, then again you won't be able to think straight and give appropriate responses. You are likely to accept the first solution and exit fast!

Ability to Manage Emotions

In any subtle or gross conflict situation it is very important to manage our emotions. E-motion is energy in motion. An energy that is not in alignment with my deepest inner truth will appear to be out of line or out of sync, and we call it 'being emotional'. We have reacted from a negative place of fear, anger or dislike. The purest emotion we can experience at all times is that of peace. If, instead of reacting to external events, we connect with the energy of our peace, we are able to pour cool water on any situation, no matter how heated it may be, and resolve conflict quietly.

Educate Yourself

If you feel you are lacking information, skills or abilities in the area of the conflict situation, then do your research and homework. The more knowledgeable you are about the subject, the more chance of you have of feeling confident and empowered.

Be Assertive

Being assertive means to express thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a direct, honest and appropriate way that maintains respect for both parties. In passive behavior you allow others to choose for you. In aggressive behavior the aggressor forces a choice on others. In assertive behavior you can state clearly what you would like and what you would not like, whilst still maintaining a level of respect.

Response-ability

In any given situation or event, it's our ability to respond appropriately that makes us responsible individuals and better leaders. To respond thoughtfully and meaningfully to a situation rather than simply reacting from habitual patterns of behaviour is the hallmark of one who is able to master, or control oneself. Such a person is more likely to master the situation in front of them. They will make more considered judgements, better decisions, and be more effective all round.

If we act immediately from a place of anger, agitation or fear, then we are simply re-living, re-enacting and reinforcing old and ineffective patterns. We are not in control of our responses and therefore unlikely to be very successful in dealing with the problem.

If we are indiscriminately blaming others for the issue or problem, for the mistake, or for making us feel bad, then we are handing over our power to them. It is a show of weakness when we blame others for how we feel or where we are at in our lives, and try to absolve ourselves of any responsibility. By blaming we try to deflect attention away from that fact but we only deceive ourselves.

Sometimes we can be our own worst enemy by not wanting to move out of our comfort zone so that we have to learn new skills and behaviours. We not only hold ourselves back, but also prevent the growth of our spirit.

A responsible person will make a judgement without worry or regret; they take a decision and accept the outcome. They will realize that not everything will go their way, that things will sometimes turn out wrong, and that other people will have different opinions, but all of that is okay. A responsible person will accept any situation and make the most of it.

Event + Response = Outcome

- We are creators of our own conflict, as we are totally responsible for how we respond to others and to the circumstances around us.
- Every response begins with our own thoughts and feelings, which are the seeds of our words and actions.

If we want to experience a different outcome from a situation, then we need to change our responses.

Response versus Reaction

To respond thoughtfully and meaningfully to a situation rather than to simply react using habitual patterns of behavior, is the hallmark of one who has learned self mastery.

Such a person is thus more likely to master the situation in front of them. They will make more considered judgments, better decisions, and be more effective all round.

Another ineffective reaction is to allow one scenario to influence the next, meaning we don't have the capacity to put a full stop and start a new page. For example, you may get upset with your wife in the morning and later react with the secretary at work through no fault of theirs. To be an effective master of our life, we need to learn to bring closure to each situation, not allowing the baggage of the past (from ten minutes ago or ten years ago) to cloud our response-ability in the present moment.

Part 4

Listening Skills



Listening Skills

Hearing is a word used to describe the physiological sensory process by which auditory sensations are received by the ears and transmitted to the brain. Listening refers to a more complex psychological procedure involving interpreting and understanding the significance of the hearing experience. (Drakeford, 1967)

Studies show that people in the Canadian culture spend 70% of the waking day in some form of verbal communication. By far the greatest time is spent in listening.

Most of the time we don't listen to understand, we listen to reply. Most conflicts would not occur if we stopped to actually listen to what the other person was saying. Listening involves much more than just hearing. It means to be fully engaged with not just the ears, but also with eyes, mind and heart.

Non-Verbal Components of Active Listening

Eye Contact

Looking directly at another person when you are speaking is an effective way of indicating that you are sincere and intend to be heard. (Be aware of cultural differences.)

Body Posture

The 'weight' of your message to others will be increased if you face the person, stand or sit appropriately close to them, lean slightly forward and hold your head erect.

Gestures

A message accented with appropriate gestures takes on an added emphasis.

Facial Expression

Effective assertiveness requires an expression that agrees with the message (congruency).

Voice Tone, Inflection, Volume

A whispered monotone will seldom convince another person that you mean business, while a shouted epithet will often evoke a defensive reaction. A level, well modulated conversational statement is convincing without being intimidating.

Timing

Spontaneous expression is often more assertive than a hesitation. Judgment is necessary, however, to select an appropriate occasion. For example, you may decide to speak to your boss in the privacy of his or her office, rather than in front of a group.

Non-Verbal Components of Active Listening

Adapted from *Your Perfect Right: A Guide to Assertive Behaviour*

by Robert E. Alberti and Michael L. Emmons, IMPACT publishers, 1976

Have You Been Listening?

To show you have been listening to the other person or party, reflect back to them what you heard using your own words but at the same time trying to tap into the feelings being expressed.

Empathic Responses

- Pinky: "There is always so much to do around here; it's non-stop!"
Sister Jayanti: "You sound like you are really tired and need a break."
Harold: "It's been four weeks now, if Timothy doesn't bring the spare parts, I am quitting this project!"
Sis Manda: "I can understand how waiting for so long can feel so frustrating."

Summarize

In your own words summarize what you think you heard, not only to show you have been listening but for accuracy sake also.

"Let's take a recap here. What I heard you say is that...and your main concern is ..."

"I heard you say that from now on you wil...and you will inform me when you do."

Paraphrase

To paraphrase means to sum up something by rephrasing it. It is used to reflect back to the other person what was said or to understand them better:

"So is it true, I heard you say that I withheld information from the boss?"

"So in our weekly meetings, you prefer that I allow you to finish your statements before I begin mine?"

Rate Your Listening Skills

How often do you indulge in ten, almost universal, bad listening habits? Check yourself carefully on each one, then tally your score.

Rating	Almost Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Almost Never
Points	0	3	5	7	10
Resist ideas that are of no personal interest.					
Faking attention to the other party (daydreaming).					
Avoid difficult material (putting off).					
Tolerating or creating distractions.					
Recreating negative past experiences with a person.					
Returning to "safe" topic when feelings brought out.					
Getting over stimulated by some point being made.					
Letting bias or prejudice interfere.					
Failure to check out or state your feelings.					
Failure to use non-verbal information.					
Point Totals					

Your Score _____

90 and aboveExtraordinarily Good Listener

70 to 80Good Listener

Below 70Can use some Listening Training

Rate Your Listening Skills

Centre for Conflict Resolution Training

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Empathy

Empathy is a vital ingredient in active listening. Empathy is the humility and willingness to stand in the shoes of the other person and to accept their feelings. This does not mean we have to agree with them, but that we should take a moment to step away from our own needs and wants to focus on the other individual by giving them some attention. Some are naturally more empathetic than others yet it is an ability that will immediately break the ice between two parties if exercised genuinely.

Exercise: The Empathic Response

In the situations below, respond as if you were the person being spoken to. Choose the response that you feel would be the most effective in communicating to the other party that you are genuinely concerned about them and about the problem. Rank all four responses from (1) most effective to (4) least effective.

1. Employee to Supervisor

"I was just asking you for your feedback, but all you ever give me is criticism. It's as though I never do anything right."

- a. "You want feedback, but I give you criticism?"
- b. "I'm just trying to point out what I see as the problems."
- c. "Take a hint."
- d. "You're concerned that I seem to highlight problems and ignore your strengths."

2. Employee to Co-worker

"You had no right to tell those people about my personal life in the middle business meeting."

- a. "You're too sensitive for your own good."
- b. "I didn't mean to upset you."
- c. "You didn't think my comment was appropriate in that setting."
- d. "I don't agree."

3. Employee to Supervisor

"I want you to know that I'm having a really difficult time working with Philomena and I'm afraid the project is going to suffer if something isn't done about it."

- a. "I'm sure you two can work it out."
- b. "You would like me to deal with it?"
- c. "You sound really anxious about how to deal with it."
- d. "Everyone has trouble with Philomena."

Exercise: The Empathic Response

© Jillian Sawers

A List of Feeling Words

These will be useful when trying to express yourself during conflict resolution

Negative Self-Esteem

Embarrassed
Ashamed
Humiliated
Guilty
Insecure
Ignored
Neglected
Doubtful
Unimportant

Regretful
Unsure
Intimidated
Uncertain
Left Out
Unappreciated

Positive Self-Esteem

Competent
Confident
Determined
Proud
Fulfilled
Capable
Needed
Secure
Important
Appreciated

Happiness/Joy

Happy
Amused
Delighted
Pleased
Cheerful
Grateful
Surprised
Hopeful
Enthusiastic
Glad
Excited
"Turned On"

Depression

Discouraged
Disappointed
Hurt
Crushed
Drained
Used
Bored
Shy
Down
Sad

Frustration

Blocked
Trapped
Burdened
Smothered
Overwhelmed
Frustrated
Torn
Driven
Exasperated

Supportive

Caring
Loving
Sympathy
Pity

Fear/Anxiety

Frightened
Anxious
Threatened
Scared
Worried
Nervous

Anger/Hostility

Mad
Angry
Furious
Bitter
Envious
Disgusted
Cheated
Upset

A List of Emotion Words

Happy

gay
festive
contented
satisfied
serene
comfortable
peaceful
tranquil
joyous
ecstatic
rapturous
transported
enthusiastic
inspired
glad
pleased
blissful
cheerful
genial
funny
high-spirited
lighthearted
buoyant
bright
free & easy
airy
saucy
jaunty
sprightly
lively
spirited
animated
vivacious

Sad

brisk
sparkling
merry
hilarious
exhilarated
jovial
jolly
jocular
joyful
gleeful
frisky
elated
exultant
jubilant

heavy-hearted
joyless
spiritless
dismal
dark
clouded
frowning
lugubrious
funereal
mournful
dreadful
dreary
flat
dull
oppressed
downhearted
in the dumps
sullen
mumpish

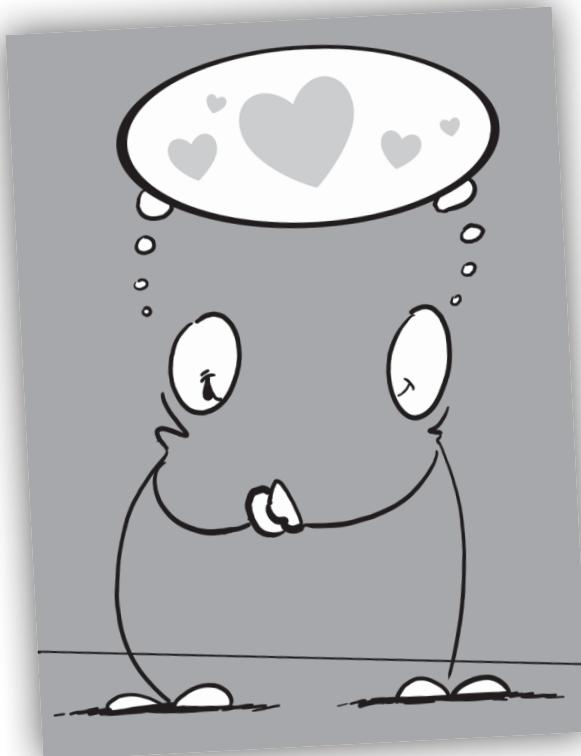
Angry

resentful
irritated
enraged
furious
annoyed
inflamed
provoked
piqued
incensed
infuriated
offended
sullen
wrought up
worked up
indignant
irate
wrathful
cross
sulky
bitter
boiling
fuming
in a stew
up in arms
in a huff

Afraid	Hurt	Interested	Fearless
fearful	injured	concerned	encouraged
frightened	offended	affected	courageous
timid	grieved	fascinated	confident
nervous	distressed	engrossed	secure
fainthearted	in pain	intrigued	reassured
tremulous	suffering	absorbed	bold
shaky	afflicted	excited	brave
apprehensive	worried	curious	daring
idgety	aching	inquisitive	gallant
restless	crushed	inquiring	heroic
aghast	victimized	nosey	self-reliant
terrified	heartbroken	snoopy	spirited
panicked	in despair		resolute
hysterical	agonized		stout-hearted
alarmed	tortured		enterprising
shocked	woeful		hardy
horrified	rueful		determined
insecure	mournful		audacious
anxious	sat		dauntless
worried	tragic		certain
misgiving			
doubtful			
suspicious			
hesitant			
awed			
dismayed			
scared			
trembling			
quaking			
threatened			
menaced			
appalled			
petrified			
Eager			Doubtful
			unbelieving
			skeptical
			distrustful
			suspicious
			dubious
			uncertain
			questioning
			wavering
			hesitant
			perplexed
			indecisive
			misgiving

Part 5

Practical Resolution



Being Present

When resolving conflict, it is very important to give respect by being completely focused – totally present with mind and body. Looking up and down or sideways are non-verbal signs of disrespect.

Posture

"Each region of the body can be oriented in such a way that it invites, facilitates or holds an interpersonal relationship. Or it can be oriented in order to break off, discourage, or avoid involvement." (Scheflen, Ashraft 1976, p.p. 6,42).

Be natural.

Sit relaxed, facing the other person.

Keep a comfortable distance.

Keep an open posture (no arms folded).

Respond with Feeling and Attention

"To listen is to move. To listen is to be moved by the talker – physically and psychologically ... The non-moving, unblinking personal can reliably be estimated to be a non-listener ... When other visible moving has ceased and the eye blink rate has fallen to less than once in six seconds, listening, for practical purposes, has stopped." (Ernst. 1973)

Focused Vision

It is a fine balance to be able to give someone your undivided attention without making them feel that you are staring them in the face. Express a genuine interest to listen and to know more.

In some cultures it is rude to look at someone in the face while speaking to them about your deep seated feelings – be aware of these differences. This does not mean they are being rude, in fact they are being polite.

Ensure that there is no physical barrier between you and the other person. The less barriers the more chances of open communication.

Be Warm and Genuine

It's important to be genuine and show warmth when engaging in dialogue. You may do this by reaching out to the other person with your posture or your voice tone or facial expression. Warmth can also be communicated through words such as: "I am sorry you feel that way, tell me more."

When verbal and non-verbal messages do not agree, the other person usually believes the non-verbal, even though they are not conscious of this themselves.

Show Respect

Your chances of resolving your conflict will increase if you express deep and genuine respect to the other person. This can be done by trying to understand them, by listening with attention, by being non-judgmental, by valuing them and telling them so, and by believing in them.

Win-Win Conflict Resolution

One of the best ways of resolving conflict is by using the method of win-win conflict resolution. Most people are unaware that conflict can even be resolved with win-win because we still carry the old fashioned attitude that in order for me to have what I want, you have to lose. If you are stuck in a 'win or lose' rut then a shift needs to occur. Shifts must occur in our ways of thinking as well as our words and deeds.

The chart below demonstrates the differences between a win-lose approach and a win-win approach. As we hold onto our position of what we want, we expect the other person to accept that solution. This only creates tension and a tug of war. As we focus on interests we realize there are many ways to meet our interests.

Positions versus Interests

WIN-LOSE (position based)		WIN-LOSE (interest based)
Attitude of ME versus YOU or US versus THEM.	ATTITUDES	US versus THE PROBLEM or THE ISSUE.
Take on the issues personally. Get self-righteous or feel like a failure.	ISSUES	The issues are just that—issues, and you don't take them personally.
Narrow the focus on the conflict, particularly what you will say or do next.	FOCUS	Focus on the larger picture and how this conflict impacts short and long term.
Get really stuck on your own viewpoint. Your solution/position is obviously right.	FLEXIBILITY AND OPENNESS	Openness to other points of view; open to be influenced by another's point of view.
Manipulate the other to your point of view. Hide your feelings. Add pressure to the situation. Try to get them to feel bad.	SINCERITY	Be honest with what is going on for you. Communicate openly and authentically.
Get angry and cut off contact with others if they don't see things your way.	CONTACT	Keep lines of communication open.
Assumes that someone will come out the winner and someone the loser.	OUTCOME	Look for outcomes which will be mutually satisfying.

Practical Resolution Skills

"I"

Always express feelings from the "I" perspective.

So instead of saying: "When you shout you make me angry and peaceless."
Say: "I really become uncomfortable when you raise your voice."

Note here, that although you are saying, "you raise your voice", it is simply a description of what they are doing and this is acceptable. You are not making any judgment about it, such as they are angry or shouting etc. Pointing out facts can actually be quite eye-opening for the other person.

Listen

Actively listen and not just 'hear' whilst the other party talks. Do not interrupt them and do not begin to hit back the next volley before they have finished! Don't help them finish their sentences, give them time and they will find the right words and feelings to express themselves.

Observe Body Language

Be confident and warm. Show respect by having an open posture that is willing to engage. Be consistent with verbal and non-verbal messages.

Ask Clarifying Questions

It's quite common to ask questions to understand the other person's position or interest. Closed questions elicit a specific "Yes" or "No" response and are used to check specific facts or understanding. Open questions are broad in nature, more descriptive and allow the other person to elaborate further.

Open Question: "What don't you like about the decision made last week?"

Closed Question: "So you don't like the decision made last week?"

Open Question: "What is the weather like?"

Closed Question: "Is it raining?"

Open Question: "Can you share your thoughts about doing another Peace in the Park program?"

Closed Question: "Should we have another 'Peace in the Park' program?"

Avoid accusatory questions such as: "Well why didn't you do it yourself then?"

Watch Your Language

Avoid the use of strong terms.

For example:

“I hate everyone around here!”

“For God’s sake!”

“Everyone is just so stupid around here!”

Look for areas of agreement. It’s important to highlight where both parties meet and so point out the general issues you have in common. Make optimistic statements.

For example:

“Since we are both eager and willing, I think we can work this out.”

“I know how much you love peace and solitude and so do I.”

Request Behavior Changes Only

Conflict occurs because of differences of opinions and attitudes. We think if only the other person would change, then our life would be easier. In conflict resolution dialogue, you can ask the other party to stop doing something, but then also state what you would like them to do instead.

For example:

“Please do not dim the lights when I am in the middle of my lecture;
please wait for me to finish.”

“It would be better if you did not sit there by the door, please sit in the front.”

“Please do not leave the room the untidy, kindly clean up before leaving.”

Avoid Use of “Always” and “Never”

“Always” and “never” are terms of exaggeration. As are “everyone” and “no-one”! When used with a tone of anger, we simply escalate the conflict.

For example:

“You never wash the dishes!”

“I am always doing the shopping!”

“We never get time to have a break!”

Use “And” Instead of “But”

For example:

“Charlie, you did a great job of arranging the retreat,

AND it would have been good to have had a feedback session at the end.”

“Jasuben I loved your soup AND it would taste even better with fresh basil.”

“Alka thanks for contacting that person AND next time just keep me in the loop.”

Watch Your Tone

“Have you not finished that yet?”

“Well who’s going to take care of the students?”

“Can you go and open the door please!”

The Dynamics of Conflict

Conflict is Intricate and Complicated

Conflict is complicated, mainly because there can be so many components involved in any given situation. For example there may be the expectations and desires of each individual, individual personal beliefs, different types of personalities, various attitudes and experiences, differing values, an assortment of cultures and backgrounds, as well as other external factors such as the time period. All of these dynamics and many more besides, can influence the situation and the outcome.

Definition of Terms

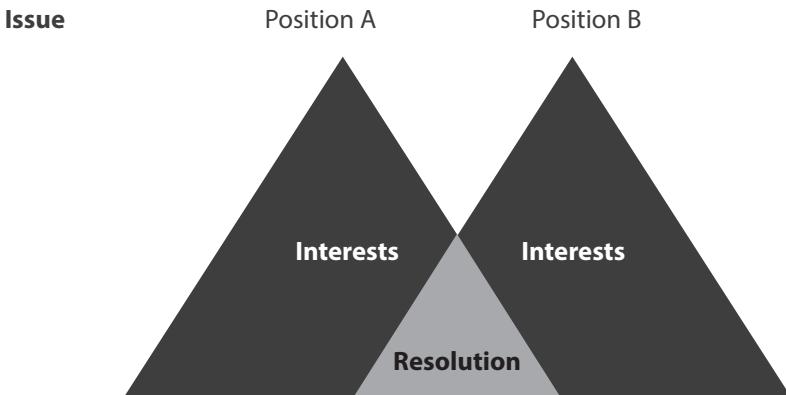
Issue	The problem people are hoping to resolve.
Position	A solution which meets one's own needs, often expressed as demands and refusals, such as: "I want." "I don't want." "I must have." "I refuse."
Interest	A collection of needs which motivate a person. Hopes, expectations, goals. Fears and concerns. Beliefs and values. Priorities.

By focusing on interests rather than positions, it is easier to find mutually satisfying solutions to conflicts.

Only after exploring positions and interests can we arrive at creative problem solving. Most people jump to problem solving at the offset, without hearing the other persons needs or clarifying their own. As we act hastily, we run into the disadvantage of perhaps only half solving the problem.

Let us take the example of two mothers. Both of them want the last lemon in the fridge. If we asked them, one might say I want the lemon ... so that I can use the juice of the lemon to make lemonade. The other might say I want the lemon ... so that I can use the zest of the lemon to make biscuits. What each mother wants is her position, why she wants it is her interest. The best solution in this case is to extract the juice and give the other the zest.

Had we acted hastily without exploring the interests, we may just end up cutting the lemon in half and giving each mother half, which would only result in each one wasting what they did not require.



The grey triangle represents those interests you have in common and therefore the place you 'meet' the other person. This is where you can begin to jointly create solutions to have your needs met and thus achieve closure.

Collaborative Conflict Resolution Model

Stage 1: Setting a Positive Environment

- Timing: Agree on when to discuss the conflict
- Location: Agree on a mutually convenient, comfortable and possibly neutral setting conducive to discussion
- Express motivation to resolve the differences to future mutual benefit
- Listen attentively

Stage 2: Clarifying the Issue(s)

- State your own point of view with respect to what you want to talk about (the issues)
- Speak for yourself
- Invite the other person to share their point of view with respect to what they want to talk about
- Check with each other for clarity
- Listen actively when he/she is speaking to ensure understanding
- Combine both parties' issues (topics) into an 'agenda'
- State the issues in a way that does not assign blame or specify an outcome
- Depersonalize the conflict

Stage 3: Exploring Interests

- State and check out assumptions
- Look for common ground
- Explore the interests of the other person in regard to the issue(s). (Consider their hopes, fears, concerns, expectations, beliefs. Etc.)
- Listen actively and continue to check for understanding
- Be descriptive rather than judgmental
- Ask open-ended questions
- Speak about your interests in a respectful assertive way
- Speak for yourself
- Use and encourage assertive, rather than aggressive or passive behaviours and words
- Summarize interests (what is important to both parties) in regard to the issue(s)

Stage 4: Resolution

- Invite brainstorming (mutual generation of options based on the interests of both parties)
- Evaluate the options: Check for fairness – meeting the interests of both parties
- Choose an option or combination of options that work for both parties
- Form an action plan: Who, what, when, where, how and work out details
- Design a way to evaluate the effectiveness of the solution
- If a solution is not becoming apparent, you may need more information, more trust or energy, or less fear
 - You may need to break and come back to the discussion
 - You may agree to disagree or agree that you cannot resolve the issue at this time and set a time for future discussion
 - You may obtain the needed information, work to increase trust, or reduce the fear

Stages of Conflict Resolution

Once you have agreed with the other party/parties to sit down together and resolve your issues, then this step by step process will help you to keep on track to accomplish your ultimate goals.

Stage #1: Creating a Positive Environment

Create the best environment you can to create a feeling of mutual commitment towards achieving the best outcome for all. This includes making the environment around you comfortable and welcoming, and also creating the emotional atmosphere that will be most conducive to success. Make sure you are in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Be aware to maintain a positive and empathetic tone of voice and facial expression. Be aware of the words you are using, and aim towards maintaining this positive environment throughout the conversation.

Stage #2: Clarify the Issues

It is important at this stage to be clear about what the issues are. Make sure that everyone has a chance to say what they wish to be addressed within the discussion. This will ensure that all parties understand why they are there, and also understand the other person's viewpoint. Discuss the issue with detachment, which means not apportioning blame or making things personal.

Stage #3: Explore the Interests

At this stage each will give and receive information regarding what is important to each one with regard to issues and why. Each should have the opportunity to speak about their needs, wishes, goals, beliefs and hopes as well as concerns and fears. It is about exploring the issues in more depth, understanding what is important to the other person, and letting them know what is important to you. It involves questioning and listening. It will clear up misunderstandings. It will begin to pave the way for a resolution. You may find that there are areas of agreement emerging already.

Stage #4: Resolution

The goal here is to find mutual agreement on ways to resolve the conflict, based on the individual interests. It is about coming up with ideas and choosing options that meet the needs of, and are agreeable to both parties so that a mutually satisfying outcome is achieved.

Appendix

A selection of articles from
Aruna Ladva's blog, '*It's Time...*'
(www.arunladva.org)

► **Spiritual Self-Confidence**

Everyone can use a little extra confidence in their lives from time to time. Feeling good about our abilities and ourselves affects every area of our daily lives. It's a good thing to have confidence; even young graduates walking out of Uni carry an air of confidence, but at the same time it's even more important to cultivate spiritual self-confidence in an age that demands more than just a paper certificate!

Spiritual confidence is a deep knowingness that comes from an innate self-respect. It's a unique sense of absolute conviction that cannot be affected by inner or outer fluctuations. You know even before you know (that the outcome will be good-whatever happens!) Like a master who has absolute faith that victory is just around the corner.

Because the inner effort is already registered, the self-worthy soul remains carefree knowing that success is guaranteed. In fact, the spiritually self-confident soul intuitively knows that he deserves the best in life and therefore will continue receiving all the time – he need not ask or doubt. He need not expect from life, he is confident that life will deliver only the best – no matter in what guise it may come. Like a student who has studied hard knows that he deserves to pass, or the person who is waiting in line – he knows that his effort will be rewarded soon.

Spiritual self-confidence based on true self-respect is a secure and steadfast anchor in the midst of a heavy storm in the sea of life (and death!). It keeps us grounded; it keeps us balanced. It acts as a reference point in our life, a springboard that determines the quality of our thoughts, words and actions. It makes us spiritual and emotionally apt at handling life's many challenges with ease.

Spiritual self-confidence is visible in the eyes of those who walk the path of truth. Honesty and integrity allow me to walk with confidence. In fact, only when the soul is totally mindful of its positive innate qualities, can it be totally spiritually confident. Otherwise after all, what has the soul got to be confident about, if not its personal stock of attributes received from the Divine Creator Himself?

Without spiritual self-respect and self-confidence based on our deepest truth, doubt can creep in. Doubt is the biggest killer for a spiritual warrior. It finishes all enlightened awareness. An ounce of doubt is like a pinch of poison – wrecking all that has been established before hand. The spiritual warrior cannot allow one single negative or frail thought to weaken his confidence. Because one thought gives birth to another and another; it would then be like walking back down the rungs of the ladder that has already taken so long to climb. He has to stay totally focused on the future and his goal of victory.

In fact the spiritually confident warrior has to be vigilant over two voices if he is to walk the tightrope of life... the inner voice of self-doubt and the outer of criticism and envy of others. Listening to any of these negative voices will make the warrior lose his concentration and tip his balance. He also has to be watchful of negative vibrations that can feel like daggers impeding his progress. The spiritually confident knows how to stay safe, he knows which company to keep, and how to influence those around him.

Madmen and megalomaniacs also demonstrate self-confidence, but that is not the confidence that comes from knowing the secrets of life. It's an empty confidence that comes from arrogance and ego, a desire to dominate and use power over as opposed to power shared. This kind of confidence is dangerous, short-lived and little admired.

Rigid comfort zones can also hinder confidence. Staying stuck in what seems comfortable won't necessarily allow you to grow and spread your wings. As you expose yourselves to different adventures and risks you increase your inner tool set and are able to adapt to a variety of situations. Knowing that you already have the tools within, is confidence in itself.

Methods to boost confidence:

Stay in silence and get comfortable within your 'own skin'. Spend periods of time building your inner reserve with silent time. Normally the illusion in the world is that the biggest and loudest are the more confident, but in the spiritual world, it is those who are silent who are the deepest and most confident.

Practice abundance consciousness. Always operate from a place of having everything and you will be confident. If you feel a lack of wealth or possessions or love or respect, then your confidence level will sink and you won't be as powerful as you could be.

Cultivate self-worth by knowing your real attributes and strengthen your connection with the Creator: the Source from which all your spiritual powers and strengths originate.

Practice makes perfect. Visualise yourself as calm and confident in every situation... every time.

Keep God as your companion. Knowing that I have this supreme spiritual support makes me even more confident. I am not alone, God is walking the path with me.

It's Time... To develop trust and faith in the self and God, knowing that all is indeed well, that everything happens according to Divine order. In soul awareness, the basis for confidence is your deepest, unchanging truth. Let go of worry and doubt – you were born to be victorious and don't ever allow that 'little voice' to tell you otherwise!

► Conflict Management (part 1 of 2)

Conflict is there from the day we are born – the baby crying for milk or a nappy change, is in conflict! Any time we are in need, we are in conflict, in a constant pursuit of having that need met. Accept this fact, and you end the struggle, and anything that comes thereafter is in fact a bonus!

Definition of Conflict: The actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, wishes or perceptions resulting in stress or tension. (The Justice Institute of British Columbia, Canada).

We work so hard to make our lives proper and perfect that we never have the time to stop and enjoy the beauty and splendor of what we have created. This creates a constant tension in life. We give this pattern many different names; stress, dysfunction, addiction or passive aggressive. We prefer to label the sickness, for we feel better justifying our poor mental health and inability to tolerate life's cycles. But the point is, we are not at peace with ourselves. We do not know where we are heading yet we speed up the runaway freight train we have created. This type of psychological instability is the root cause for restlessness and frustration, resulting in conflicts of various types.

There is a Zen story about a peasant farmer who owned a beautiful horse desired by others. One day it disappeared. When all the villagers remarked on his bad luck, he calmly replied, "Maybe, maybe not." A few days later the horse returned, leading a herd of fine wild horses. This time the villagers remarked, "How lucky you are". "Maybe, maybe not?" he replied. A week later, his only son was thrown and crippled while training the horses. When the villagers again commented on his bad luck, he calmly replied, "Maybe, maybe not." Within a week, the emperor declared a frivolous war and all young able men, save the farmer's son, were forced into battle and none returned. The moral of the story, nothing is as it seems!

What's my first response to a conflict situation? Is it to back off or move head on? Is it a difficulty or an opportunity? Do I fall into the blame game, or do I take responsibility? Do I fall into old patterns of behaviour or do I take time to create new ones. Do I withdraw, get aggressive, become passive or go into denial? Whatever is my response to conflict will be a clear indication of how I deal with a conflict situation.

If for example my response to conflict is to pretend nothing is wrong, then I will deny the conflict. If for example my response to conflict is to cry out of self-pity, then I will feel incapable or ill-equipped to tackle the conflict. If my response is to simply complain without taking action, then I will ignore the real issue of conflict. If my response to conflict is that it is normal and part and parcel of life, then I will work towards finding a resolution

Our lives are not dependent on whether or not we have conflict. It is what we do with the conflict that makes the difference. How we perceive conflict is all in our mind. When we oppose we are in separation. When both parties see the same picture, there is connectedness. The art of conflict management is for all parties involved to be able to see the same picture from various different perspectives and to appreciate it. It is when I insist that what I see is the only view that conflict begins.

Conflict often pushes us into the survival mode. When we perceive ourselves as separate and disconnected from those around us, there becomes a feeling of ‘you and me’ and a sense that there isn’t enough for both of us. This perception of scarcity develops a mindset of survival, and people spend a significant portion of their time operating in this mode. There is fear that there is not enough money, energy or resources to go around. Therefore the tendency is to get all we can for us and to keep the doors barred because someone is always trying to get into the ‘cookie jar’. In a scarcity context, the experience is one of tremendous energy output, but the net result is mere survival. Like swimming in a strong current, all of our energy seems to be used in maintaining our position or staying afloat.

Once we fall into this ‘survival’ trap, competition begins. We think of conflict as a contest and life becomes a big scoreboard. It’s as though we need to be gaining points through ‘winning’ conflicts, as though we need a certain amount of points under our belt to get to heaven or a better place! The adrenalin is on and we have to win!

Conflict is not a contest. Conflict just is. We choose whether to make it a contest in which there are winners and losers.

Have you ever been upset when your colleagues don’t share your point of view, or the kids rebel at your ideas, or your spouse does the opposite of what you expect? What is your knee-jerk reaction? Is it your fear of losing? The fear of being wrong? The need to prove yourself? The EGO under attack? When conflict becomes a win-lose contest in our minds, we immediately try to “win”. The big question is, was there really a contest in the first place?

Stay tuned for part two for more tips on how to manage conflict.

It's Time...this week to observe yourself – how much you act out of fear and how much you act out of love. Do you constantly find yourself looking at the scoreboard? Trying to out-do the other person? If so, let go of the tension. Choose to learn from the lesson – to build bridges and make everyone a winner instead of running off alone with the trophy!

► Conflict Management (part 2 of 2)

Conflict is neither good or bad it “just is”, and should be accepted as part of living in a global community. Depending on how conflict is managed it can be quite a healthy experience. It can teach us new skills and levels of understanding. It can build confidence and self-respect. It can lead to a positive outcome and motivate us away from stagnation. Conflict is about living with our differences, it is not a case of right or wrong. At the worst, one can always agree to disagree.

The word resolution is derived from the Latin: re, which means once again and solvent meaning, no further distillation. Therefore conflict resolution is about getting to the essence of what is causing the conflict; those unmet needs and underlying interests.

Using the knowledge of martial arts helps us a lot in learning how to deal with our ‘enemy’. If I can embrace the conflict then I can use it to add to my own power, my own advantage. I can ‘overthrow’ my ‘opponent’ with my quick wit, some reflex and an enormous amount of flexibility – some of the keystrokes required in self-defense arts such as Aikido and Judo. Therefore no matter how big and muscular the problem may seem, with the proper use of self-management skills, one can tackle any hurdle.

Below are some conflict management styles we adopt to deal with our problems, as described by the Centre for Conflict Resolution, BC, Canada:

Accommodating When accommodating, an individual neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of others. There is an element of self-sacrifice. Obeying another person’s orders when one would prefer not to or yielding to another’s point of view.

Avoiding They do not address conflict. They do not pursue their own concerns or the concerns of the other person. They diplomatically side-step the issue, postponing the issue for a later time. Or simply withdraw from a threatening situation.

Collaborating (Opposite of Avoiding) They attempt to work with the other person to find some solution, which fully satisfies the concerns of both parties. Both work at the problem for a satisfactory solution, creating win-win outcomes.

Competing (Opposite of Accommodating) The individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person’s expense. This is a power-oriented mode – one uses all the power one can; rank, money, eloquence, and usually results in a win – lose outcome.

Compromising To find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution, which partially satisfies both parties. It explores an issue more directly than avoiding but does not explore it as deeply as when collaborating. This might mean... splitting the difference, exchanging concessions or seeking a quick middle ground.

Stop for a minute to identify your personality type. There is no right or wrong, all the styles serve their purpose, and are appropriate in varying situations. It is important to know which one you are so that you can predetermine your response to conflict. If I can know what my triggers are then that is half the problem solved.

Most of the time, the conflict is perceived in the mind. How many times have you expected your secretary to pick up the folders from your desk and file them away? And then at other times, you want her not to touch them, since you have neatly sorted them and will want to look at them the next day. You expect her to be your mind reader and when she doesn't do as you mentally expect her to, there is a conflict. These kinds of situations create a lot of unnecessary thoughts, which result in ill feelings and negative attitudes. We fall into the language of "always" and "never". We are so frustrated that the people around us have not yet learnt the art of mind-reading that we accuse them of "always" disrupting our work, or "never" doing anything around here!

This kind of attitude serves no purpose. A key element in conflict management is the need to communicate. Clear, effective communication is a must to avoid misunderstandings, fears, doubts, worries, etc. Assumption (commonly known as 'ass out of u and me') can never replace dialogue. When I can express myself clearly, then it doesn't leave any margin for unnecessary/extraneous thought. When the boss says as his leaving remark, please leave the files on the desk I will look at them tomorrow, the message is clear and both parties know what is expected.

Real conflict resolution is about getting to the bottom of issues that dominate the conflict situation. In fact there is always more to the situation than meets the eye. Conflicts are synonymous with icebergs. 90 percent of the iceberg is below the surface and only 10 percent is visible. In order to deal with conflicts, I have to know myself.

If, for example, we are trying to apply the skill of active listening which is based on the principle of respect for the point of view and feelings of others, yet inside we do not value or respect the other person, we will likely encounter discomfort within ourselves and definitely not be able to resolve the conflict with the other person. Similarly, our attempt at using the skills will sound and feel artificial – to ourselves as well as others. Therefore new, genuine behaviors also need to become part of how we think and feel.

► Conflict Management Skills

Clear Communication

Don't leave any margin for assumption. Communicate your needs, wishes and desires in an effective and respectful manner.

Increase Inner Work

Understanding oneself is a very deep subject and the lessons can last up to a lifetime. Reflect, and look inside for what's going on, before pointing the finger out there.

Weigh Up the Cost of the Conflict

Before taking any step, it is important to weigh up the cost of avoiding the conflict. If I am clear on my gains and losses that will give me a picture of how to proceed.

Build Up Your Power Base

The collaborative conflict resolution process is designed to use power to benefit both parties and reflective of establishing an environment of mutual respect.

When Speaking, Talk from the “I” Perspective

“I” statements indicate you take responsibility for your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. People are less likely to object to “I” statements. Stay away from blame and express what you need to in clear, specific and positive terms, stating what you see, hear, think and/or feel. E.g. “I feel frustrated because I am not allowed to finish my sentences.” Instead of, “stop interrupting me all the time!”

Move from Judgment to Curiosity

If we approach conflicts with an attitude of judgment about others or ourselves we will find it difficult to be collaborative. Judgmental thinking implies that one person is ‘right’ and the other is ‘wrong’ and creates a concept of ‘you versus me’.

An attitude of curiosity allows us to listen to another’s point of view with openness and respect for differences. Neither of us is the problem; the dispute or unresolved issues becomes the problem. We become united in tackling the common enemy.

Shift from Defensive and Aggressive to Empathic and Assertive

A defensive or aggressive climate escalates conflict. In this mode there is normally a tendency to make the people the problem. When we use empathic and assertive approaches, it is more likely that we can establish a collaborative environment and

focus on the issues that are really causing the conflict in the first place. When we depersonalize a problem, we focus on the issue as separate from the people. Our focus is turned away from blaming others and towards understanding others.

Shift from Win/Lose to Win/Win

Stop looking at the scoreboard. If you lose the small battles, it doesn't matter you will definitely win the war! Shifts must occur in our ways of thinking as well as our words and actions. Ultimately, our style will be determined by the combination of our attitudes and behaviors.

Our thoughts generate reality. Everything begins with a thought. If we become more aware of our thoughts and understand the process of working with our thoughts to generate a positive result, then we will truly understand ourselves and be able to exercise choice about what goes on in our heads and out through our actions. I am 80 percent responsible for the way people treat me. So respect, and you will be respected.

It's Time...to embrace the conflict. If you resist it persists! If one does not overcome the conflict with the person or situation, it will only continue until the lesson is learnt, in which case you will definitely need to view the scoreboard!

► At Peace

We often use the term ‘I am a peaceful soul’ or a ‘peaceful being’ to refer to a state of mind in which the soul is undisturbed, completely calm, cool and still inside. Yet there is an even deeper soul state to experience on the spiritual journey, which is defined as being ‘at peace’.

To be completely at peace with everyone and everything around you is the final stage of the yogi; a state in which there is no pull or desire in any direction. The soul is completely comfortable, balanced and content with every area of his life, physically, emotionally and spiritually. This state of fulfilment brings happiness and a deep sense of contentment in the soul. Before we ask how we can arrive at this stage, let us look at what takes away our peace of mind and prevents us from being ‘at peace’.

The main thief of our peace has to be the inner conflict between the head and the heart, the restlessness we feel when we are not in alignment with ourselves. Very often it has to do with what we desire versus what we feel we should be choosing according to our highest spiritual morals, values and conscience. An example for some would be a tug of war between flying economy class as opposed to business class or purchasing an ordinary handbag versus a designer bag. In both cases one is caught in the struggle between using the money for a better cause or indulging in one’s comfort and luxury. Other simpler examples would be economising on paper and using pedal power to save the planet whilst compromising comfort. Or opting for simplicity and risking being mocked for your plain lifestyle. The ultimate question is how do we find the fine line between being responsible and being comfortable. Should we listen to our conscience or pander to our ego and image? Ultimately the fine line disappears and we can be totally comfortable and totally responsible.

Too many unrealistic desires can also be a cause for internal upheaval. One desire gives birth to another and another, and we are forever trying to plug a bottomless hole. The accomplices of desire are very often anger, greed, attachment, ego and lust. They all create an illusion of happiness and power when in fact they make us more peaceless and restless. Learning to take a closer look at our desires, and checking whether they are helping us achieve our greater goal of peace and happiness will save us a lot of suffering. Over-worrying and thinking too much also takes away our peace, as does holding onto unresolved feuds and past grievances.

Taking responsibility for our lives and deciding not to join in the blame game, forgiving, letting go of grievances and cultivating acceptance all give us a deep sense of being at peace. Learn to imbibe every spiritual principle as a master and not blindly. Understand

the repercussions of your decisions, embrace them and do not submit to the ‘poor me’ syndrome. We then realise that as we let go of certain things on the path, we receive a lot more in return. Hence there is no feeling of being deprived. Learning to come to terms with all areas of your life will bring a greater sense of fulfilment and happiness. True satisfaction will come when you are indeed making the ‘right’ choices.

Someone I know chose to fly economy class rather than his usual first class. He checked himself as he boarded and turned right towards economy class instead of left towards first. Rather than suffering he gained a sense of victory over his ego. He realised that real freedom is when we can control our inner experience rather than allowing the game of position and possession to control us.

Until you arrive at that state of peace, there will always be an inner conflict. The more inner work you do, and the more you act from your higher self, the less the outer world will influence you.

And once you arrive at that state of peace, all inner conflict ceases. There are no extra thoughts of doubt, worry, fear and you are free to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of every situation, no matter which way you turn!

It's Time...to be at peace.

► The “W” Perspective

The letter ‘W’ viewed from four different sides could give four very different meanings. Seen from different angles it can either be read as the number 3, an E, M or W. This just proves the point that four people sitting around a table will have at least four different opinions about the same situation. And the scary thing is... they are all right!

The perspective we ‘choose’ to take on any situation very much depends on our past experiences, our beliefs, our conditioning, our present mood and/or a multitude of other variables. The point is that, without stopping to consider another person’s perspective, we so often think that we are ‘right’, and the other party is therefore invariably wrong.

We see this scenario played out everywhere, from school playgrounds to the world stage, often with disastrous consequences.

Our ego blinds us to the viewpoints of others. Our personal opinions become ‘The Truth’. We insist on not removing the blinkers that keep us narrow minded and judgmental, and yet how often have we been made a fool when we find out that others can also be right?

It takes a great deal of humility and patience to view things from another person’s perspective. How true is the saying, “Don’t comment on a person’s life, unless you have walked a mile in their shoes”?

Learning to hold back, listen, consider, and respond thoughtfully are all important skills in maintaining relationships. What is more – as we hear it ‘from the horse’s mouth’, we may even learn something new, find another way of doing things, expand our horizons, and at the very least begin to understand that everyone has something to offer and that rarely are things either black or white and there may be merit in a variety of options. Real listening is the basis of good communication, and ultimately good relationships.

To insist on talking when we should be listening, is not communication, it is dictatorship.

The fact that we have nearly 7 billion people in the world would imply that we have a minimum of that many opinions. Each human is a world unto himself and has a right to his own opinion, perspective and belief. One could wonder how then it would be possible to create harmony in any relationship, or in the world.

An orchestra is an excellent example of harmony at its best. Each instrument is so unique and yet the sound that emerges from the collective is absolutely splendid. And furthermore, the more instruments the ‘merrier’ the music!

If we always engage in one-sided communications, then there will always be winners and losers. However, win/win outcomes are totally possible when we stay open and curious instead of closed and critical, and when we respect each other as a human being and an individual with individual ideas and points of view.

It is always possible to acknowledge and accept someone else's opinion without agreeing with it. This is the basis of conflict resolution – 'to agree to disagree'. Then the doors to real communication can open.

It's Time...to stay open and to recognise that every situation has at least four differing perspectives and that I am only seeing one angle from where I am 'sitting'. Kill the ego and develop the humility to listen to another person's opinion without wanting to be 'right'. It might just well teach me something I needed to learn and give me a more clear picture of 'The Truth'!

► Karma Revised (part 1 of 2)

Karma is a universal law encapsulated in the statement “as you sow so shall you reap”. It can be found in almost every holy book, often referred to as the Law of Cause and Effect, or the Law of Karma. Newton discovered that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, which Albert Einstein confirmed.

It is also important to remind oneself that this principle affects every area of my life. Karma literally means action. At every moment we are presented with a choice – to choose good over evil, to be kind or rude, to move slow or fast, to make things simple or complicated and so on. And depending on what action we take, we receive the return of that. It's that simple! Do good and you get something good in return. Give love and you are showered with love.

If you criticize others, you will be criticized. If you steal, you will be stolen from. If you lie and cheat, you will be cheated and lied to; and not necessarily in the same area – for example, if you cheat in business, perhaps your wife will cheat on you at home!

But isn't it interesting that during these setbacks and losses, it's not so easy to accept the outcome. And I have the audacity to question, “Why me”? or “How is this possible?” Why do I not question “Why me?” when I win the lottery?

When I don't get love and respect, I wonder why not and very often point the finger at the opposite party. I am not able to consider for a minute that perhaps I could be the guilty (and lazy!) party! One who has not put in enough hard work to make positive things happen. Have I stopped to check the quality of my actions as well as my purity of intention before I question my ‘bad luck’?

I can only get back what I put out; if I plant tomato seeds I can't expect turnips! If I am enjoying warm loving friendships today, then I must have tilled the soil in the field of relationships well. If I am slim and slender, it must be because I am exercising daily or regulating my calorie intake. If I am successful in my career, it's probably due to years of hard work and continuous effort. The life I am living today is a consequence of my previous actions, i.e. yesterday's actions... and today is also soon to become yesterday... tomorrow!

It is a wonder why people bother cheating in schools or in business – do they not realise that the universal justice system is at work all the time! Even when no one is looking. Just as there is a long gap between the sowing of the seed and the harvesting of the fruit, so too there is a long gap between the actions performed and the resulting outcomes. Thus, one is unable to see the damage one's actions has on oneself.

I may feel I have escaped the police or the examiner, but it is only a matter of time before all seeds yield ‘fruit’; one’s karma will always catch up with them in their lifetime.

Karma teaches us that we have a choice and with choice comes responsibility. Therefore, do God a favour and keep Him out of the equation. The pain or pleasure I am experiencing is a result of my action, and karma teaches me that I can turn that ‘vicious’ cycle into a ‘virtuous’ one – the seeds are all in my hands to sow!

It's Time...to till the soil of your mind, to remove the weeds of unwanted feelings and undesired outcomes. You are the master of your mind and thus you can choose to create the results you seek; plant wholesome seeds of positive and powerful thoughts in all areas of your life. Then sit back and watch the fruits appear... but be patient... for unripe fruit only causes indigestion!

► Karma Revised (part 2 of 2)

Understanding the philosophy of Karma and even more importantly settling karma is imperative for it allows me to meditate without a conflict or incongruity pulling on my mind while I sit still. Knowing there is a universal justice system at work, I can rest in peace knowing that matters will be taken care of and I need not take the law into my own hands to seek justice. However I must do my part in using all my resources appropriately so that I don't incur a further debt in the account of the soul.

Karma is the law of give and take—not take and give! I can only take when I have first given even if it is my last seed, coin or object of love. If I take without having given, I have broken the law and the consequence is I will need to pay back multi-fold in order to return balance to the soul. It is a paradox and perhaps the greatest illusion of all time that when I take, I create a debt, not credit! The ultimate aim is to be in credit at all times and not debt – and for this, I need to be giving more than I am taking.

Many of us waste our personal resources without even understanding that waste is synonymous with disrespect. Just as green movements raise the awareness of not wasting the resources of planet earth and cultivating respect for the planet. Likewise as I waste my resources I create a karmic account of disrespect with them. And anything I disrespect will not serve me! It will not be ready and available when I really need it!

Since we now need to be so cognizant of our ‘soul balance’ it’s important to address the issue of waste. Waste is not waste, if it is in alignment with my highest purpose. Anything less than fulfilling my purpose is waste. Put in simple language, waste is a relative term from individual to individual as each one uses their understanding and resources in a way they know best to fulfill their purpose; what may be waste to one, may be purposeful to another.

I need to create positive, healthy, friendly relationships with all my resources, my helpers, in order for them to cooperate with me! Let's examine this further:

Time

Time is a valuable asset one that I very often find myself short of. Each second that passes will never return. Yet when I have created a positive karma with time, I will have ample time to do all the things I want to do, time will cooperate with me! When I waste time, I have not utilized that time appropriately in fulfilling my own purpose, so I am punished with a shortage of time!

Wealth

Some people have plenty of wealth and yet carry around a poverty consciousness. Thus it's not the wealth that makes one wealthy, but the attitude of having it all even whilst having little! Wealth used for a higher purpose yields the greatest return – hence the importance given to charity for a worthy cause.

Relationships

Some people seem to be connected to many others and yet when they need help, very few are around to 'return the favour'. Relationships are an investment. The more I invest love, respect, kindness, cooperation and compassion, the more I get in return.

Mind / Body

My thoughts and energy are my most valuable resources. If I misuse them then I reap the consequences. If I think about useless and negative things, I will probably get a headache. If I look at my computer screen, 15 inches away, all day, I will probably need glasses. If I am using my lungs to inhale nicotine instead of oxygen, then of course they will become unhappy and resentful!

Nature

As I learn to dispose of rubbish appropriately or learn not to waste water and other natural resources, I am creating a relationship of love and respect with Mother Nature. And it doesn't matter what everyone else throws out of their car window, my duty is to create my own personal relationship, my own personal account of respect with nature and the five elements. Only then can it help me when I am in need – so I will always have food, water and air when I need it.

It's Time...to settle all karmic accounts by respecting all your resources – waste not, want not. Get in tune with your highest purpose and align your resources with this purpose, give more than you take! The soul will become full and abundant with all its resources, and much like a tree laden with fruits, they will bow to serve you!

Afterword

And finally I would like to thank you as the reader!

If anything, I do hope this book has at least made you a little more confident and a little less fearful of dealing with conflict.

As many of the conflicts increase around the world, let us at least make an attempt to put out some of the fires in our own back yard. As we face these differences we actually become lighter and happier. We avoid less people and are more eager to make more friends.

Addressing conflict is never easy, but with the right approach and a heart full of good wishes, we can achieve anything!

I wish you all best on your spiritual journey towards peace and harmony.

Aruna Ladva Cert.ConRes

To contact Aruna or for more information visit Aruna's Blog

www.arunaladva.org

or email her at itstime.arunaladva@gmail.com

